**Directions: Read the article and answer the questions at the end. DO NOT print. Either email or handwrite the answers on lined paper.**

**Facebook treads carefully after its vital role in Egypt's anti-Mubarak protests**

By Cecilia Kang and Ian Shapira  
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[In Egypt](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/17/AR2008051702672.html), the tried-and-true tool for opponents of President Hosni Mubarak in recent years has been Facebook. Most recently, it was on Facebook - which boasts 5 million users in Egypt, the most in the Arab world - where youthful outrage over the killing of a prominent activist spread, leading to [the protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/02/AR2011020202176.html) and [Mubarak's promise to step down this year.](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/01/AR2011020105291.html?hpid=topnews)

But Facebook, which celebrates its seventh birthday Friday and has more than a half-billion users worldwide, is not eagerly embracing its role as the insurrectionists' instrument of choice. Its strategy contrasts with rivals Google and Twitter, which actively helped opposition leaders communicate after the Egyptian government shut down Internet access.

The Silicon Valley giant, whether it likes it or not, has been thrust like never before into a sensitive global political moment that pits the company's need for an open Internet against concerns that autocratic regimes could limit use of the site or shut it down altogether.

"The movement [in Egypt] was very dependent on Facebook," said Alaa Abd El Fattah, an Egyptian blogger and activist in South Africa who has a strong following in Egypt. "It started with anger then turned into a legitimate uprising."

The recent unrest in Egypt and Tunisia is forcing Facebook officials to grapple with the prospect that other governments will grow more cautious of permitting the company to operate in their countries without restrictions or close monitoring, according to David Kirkpatrick, author of ["The Facebook Effect,"](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1439102120?ie=UTF8&tag=washingtonpost-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=1439102120) [an authorized biography of the company's history](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/25/AR2010062502269.html). Facebook is also looking at whether it should allow activists to have a measure of anonymity on the site, he said.

"I have talked to people inside Facebook in the last week, and they are debating this internally," Kirkpatrick said. "Many countries where Facebook is popular have autocracies or dictatorships, and most of the countries have passively tolerated their popularity. But what's happened in Egypt or Tunisia is likely to change other countries' attitudes, and they'll be more wary of Facebook operating there."

A Facebook spokesman, Andrew Noyes, declined to make anyone at the company available to discuss its role in the Egypt protests or its strategy in politically fraught environments. In a short statement, Noyes said: "Although the turmoil in Egypt is a matter for the Egyptian people and their government to resolve, limiting Internet access for millions of people is a matter of concern for the global community. It is essential to communication and to commerce. No one should be denied access to the Internet."

(Washington Post Co. Chairman Donald E. Graham sits on Facebook's board.)

Even when Facebook has actively helped protesters work around government intrusions, the company casts its moves as mere technical solutions. Last month, after Tunisian security officials used a virus to secretly collect local Facebook user IDs and passwords, [the Internet giant took action](http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20110126/04453512834/how-facebook-dealt-with-tunisian-government-trying-to-steal-every-users-passwords.shtml). It rerouted Tunisia's Facebook traffic to a site where local Internet service providers couldn't gobble up user information.

In a statement released to The Post, the company said it viewed the predicament as just a "security problem" in need of a fix.

"Certainly there's a political context to the particular circumstance in Tunisia, but from Facebook's perspective, what happened was a security problem that required a technological solution: we prevented an exploit that was making Facebook accounts vulnerable and restored the integrity of the compromised accounts," [wrote Joe Sullivan, Facebook's chief security officer](http://news.yahoo.com/s/usnw/20110131/pl_usnw/DC38588). "We would have taken the same approach in any situation where we saw a systematic exploit."

Yet Facebook seems to be veering in a different direction than Google, which has battled China over censorship, or Twitter, the microblogging site that earned renown during the Iranian protests of 2009 for delaying a scheduled shutdown and facilitating civil protest in Tehran. This week, Twitter, Google and SayNow, a voice-based social media platform, launched a service that provides Egyptians with phone numbers to call and leave messages, which are recorded and posted on the Internet. [It's called Tweet2Speak](http://twitter.com/speak2tweet).

In early 2010, in the wake of Google's censorship clashes with China, Facebook was one of a handful of companies blasted by Congress for refusing to participate in Senate committee hearings that examined how Silicon Valley companies were operating with foreign governments. Facebook responded at the time by saying it had no employees in China and that it was a different kind of business than Google.

Facebook's director of public policy, Tim Sparapani, wrote in a letter to [Sen. Richard J. Durbin. (D-Ill.)](http://www.whorunsgov.com/Profiles/Richard_J._Durbin): "These conflicting approaches presents challenges for companies, particularly ones such as Facebook that are small and growing, to navigate new markets around the world without strong support from national governments and multinational institutions."

Facebook hasn't joined the Global Network Initiative, a nonprofit coalition of communications companies - including Microsoft, Google and Yahoo - established to create anti-censorship standards around the world. (Twitter hasn't joined, either.)

Some advocates of online free speech say Facebook can no longer linger on the sidelines.

"The good news for Twitter and Facebook is how important they are, and one should congratulate them for being critical tools," said [John Palfrey, the co-director of Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet & Society](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/people/jpalfrey). "But also, there is an obligation that comes with that level of adoption."

Even though Facebook has refrained from taking overtly political stances on Egypt, the social network remains a vital tool for conveying anti-government news about Egypt.

Riyaad Minty, al-Jazeera's social-media head, said the news agency has been live-streaming its coverage of the protests on its [Facebook fan pages](https://www.facebook.com/aljazeera?v=app_7146470109) in the United States and Arab world, boosting its fan volume by 30 to 50 percent; its half-dozen status updates about the crisis have reaped 10 million views a day, up from the 2 million daily views the pages had previously, Minty said.

"I do think governments see Facebook as a political tool, which is why Egypt has shut off the Internet," said Minty, adding that he prefers Facebook's more objective approach so it does not unnecessarily rattle conservative foreign leaders.

Additionally, Facebook ad sales teams have been helping al-Jazeera capitalize on Egypt's crisis to attract more eyeballs in the United States and build up a new, loyal audience.

"They've been giving us strategic advice," he said. "We're targeting people over 18, and our big push has been toward the U.S. audience."

Some Internet experts say Facebook needs to determine how to protect its users in countries with restrictive regimes, but the company's terms of use - which require members to use real identities - make protesters vulnerable to government spying. Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg has insisted on the policy, saying the site would lose integrity if people hid behind phony identities.

"People at Facebook have been asking themselves in the wake of Egypt or Tunisia whether there might be a way they can allow political activities in these spontaneous revolts to acquire a little bit of anonymity," said Kirkpatrick, the company's biographer. "The problem is, if they start making it easier for political activists to use Facebook in places like Egypt or Tunisia, those same capabilities are likely to be used by people we don't admire or pro-government thugs."

Kirkpatrick added that these choices all come down to the company's famously private CEO.

"Inside Facebook," he said, "there's really only one person who makes these decisions. He has to decide."

**Questions: Read and answer the questions using complete sentences when appropriate. Email or HANDWRITE the answers. DO NOT print this out no matter what.**

1. Define: insurrectionists, autocratic, legitimate, fraught, exploit, integrity, overtly, regimes

2. Why does Congress sometimes hold hearings? How can these hearings influence what people and companies do? Why was Congress concerned about the issue of technology companies operating with foreign governments?

3. Do Internet companies have an obligation to avoid cooperating with governments in certain situations?

4. Do Internet companies have an obligation to actively thwart governments?

5. Are there situations in which these companies should thwart, or refuse to cooperate with, our own government?

6. Does Google have an agenda of overthrowing the Egyptian government? If not, why did it attempt to help the protestors there communicate?

7. How is a government hurt when it does not allow access to the Internet? How would a government be hurt if it tried to shut down its phone lines, in order to stop Tweet2Speak or something like it?

8. What are some governments that have taken the steps necessary to control the flow of information? What have the results been?

9. How is it that some governments, such as ours, can remain stable even though they allow a free flow of information, which may include criticism and organizing against the government?

10. “Certainly there’s a political context to the particular circumstance in Tunisia, but from Facebook’s perspective, what happened was a security problem that required a technological solution.” Why is it important to Facebook not to take sides politically? Why don’t they see their action as taking a side politically?

11. Did Facebook have an obligation to do what it did in Tunisia? Does it have an obligation to promote free speech in ways that could be categorized as “taking a side”? Explain.